

SEPTEMBER 16, 1976

Best business to be in, in the Shortgrass Country, is going to end up being that of the fellow who founds a one ,an band instrumented by self tuning drums and French harps.

Fall work is going to be so short that the banks are going to think their collateral has dissolved. Unless the kidnapping law is revoked, we aren't going to have enough help to work the traps, much less the pastures.

Lots of the herders are getting by using sheepdogs and their wives. Dogs can be sent off to schools to learn to work sheep. As to the women, they are taught to work by the treat of the day that they'll reach for a can of coffee and find the cupboard empty.

Some time ago, I visited a smooth cheek that was looking after 40 sections by himself. Thirty years ago it would have taken a week to interview the men working on that place. But when the manager serves as the cowboy and windmill man under the same office, once the fellow is located, the work's done.

The hours and the job were agreeing with the boy. Baby fat had turned to muscle; pupils in his eyes were enlarged like those of all night prowlers. I couldn't tell much about the condition of his hair as it'd been too long since he'd been to the barbershop to make an appraisal.

I liked the setup he had. All the corrals had electric lights. The saddle shed was properly ventilated to dry the saddle blankets. No money had been spared on fencing or horseshoeing equipment. The pickup was a little old, but he had six head of two year old ponies to ride anywhere he needed to go.

I didn't ask how he used his spare time. Kids that young, you know, can find plenty of foolishness without any effort. Arrowheads and rattlesnake rattlers were piled on the bunkhouse porch, so I figured he was having a lot of fun hunting snakes and Indian artifacts.

One winter way back in the '50s, I knew a boy about his age that lost a good job like the one I'm telling you about. He was feeding 400 head of mother cows by the old-time horse and feed house method. Every fourth day, he'd hook up a team of mules to fill up the cake houses.

Winter came on mighty hard this year. I'd see the boy wrapped in salt sacks, riding in a high lope to cover his feed run. I didn't know for sure what he was making a month, but I'm certain that his wages ran way over a hundred and board.

Come spring, I missed seeing him on the fence. I finally got so curious I asked his boss where the cowboy was. His boss said he had to let him go. Seems that he charged four bottles of ketchup to the ranch in one month. At 19 cents a bottle, I don't blame the outfit for changing hands.

We have a different problem here at the ranch. I've been working with one of the men for 27 years. I never have objected to the amount of time he loses every year.

When he was younger, he developed a craze to go to homecomings that'd make that ketchup eating business look like a speck on a can of fly killer. For 27 years, he's been taking off to go to three different homecoming barbecues. For 27 years, I've been telling him that a man can't have but one home.

Why, the confounded Gypsies over in Spain don't claim a bunch of different places as home. You must realize that in 27 years he's lost over two months' time going to

homecomings. Add Christmas Day and a few odd barber shop runs to that score, and he's off the job about as much as he is on the ranch. He doesn't have to work on Sundays except during the winter. I see to it that he and his wife get off at least three days for a summer vacation.

Like I told the young ranch manager, counting the side benefits and the contact with nature, ranch work is a rewarding career for the young or the old. I don't know of a business anywhere that'd allow a man to celebrate three homecomings in one year...









